

**MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD**

Event: Visit to Reagan National Airport Control Tower in Alexandria, VA and Andrews Air Force Base Control Tower

Type: Site Visit

Date: July 28, 2003

Special Access Issues: None

Prepared by: Lisa Sullivan and reviewed and edited by all Commission participants.

Team number: 8

Location: National Airport, Alexandria, VA; Andrews AFB, Morningside, MD

Participants (non-Commission): Shirley Miller, FAA; Linda Schuessler, FAA; Peter Lynch, FAA Counsel; Donny Simons, Washington National Airport Operations Manager; and Bob Lazar, Acting-Operations Manager on 9/11

Participants (non-Commission): Shirley Miller, FAA; Linda Schuessler, FAA; Peter Lynch, FAA Counsel; Chauncey (?); Steve Marra, FAA Air Traffic Controller - supervisor; and James Ampey, Air Traffic Controller (in the Tower on 9/11)

Participants – Commission (both locations): Dana Hyde, Miles Kara, John Azzarello, and Lisa Sullivan

**I. Reagan National Airport**

**Background**

**Shirley Miller** arranged this briefing for Commission participants. **Linda Schuessler**, the manager of the Command Center on 9/11, accompanied us on the visit as did **Peter Lynch** of the FAA Counsel's Office. **Donny Simons**, the Tower manager, guided Commission staff on a tour of the control Tower and administrative wing of the airport. On 9/11, Simons was airport manager at Baltimore-Washington International Airport (BWI). Simons led the group through a security point at which staff was signed in and received visitor passes. The security guard was from a private company, rather than a federal employee. Unlike the trip to Dulles, Commission staff members were not required to walk through metal detectors to gain entrance to the Tower, as is required of all air passengers.

Many employees who were working at the NATIONAL facility on 9/11 have since moved to the new TRACON facility in Potomac, MD. (The TRACON at National has

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been shut down.) Prior to the move, National employed 67 controllers in total; 18 of which were on during a given shift; with 10-11 in the TRACON and 7-8 in the Tower. There was one supervisor in the radar room, and a controller in charge of the Tower Cap at all times. Prior to 9/11, the U.S. Secret Service operated a desk in the TRACON during occasions of significant events, such as the President's State of the Union Address.

The Tower is supervised 24 hours a day. Planes depart up and down the river, which controllers referred to as a "north/south configuration." There are four controller positions in the Tower: local, ground, assistant local, and helicopter. The local and ground positions are manned by one person who physically moves from one side of the Tower to the other depending on a north or south direction. This is manageable for one controller because National operates on a "one in, one out" system.

The perimeter of National is restricted. The Department of Transportation controls slots for departures and arrivals. The longest of the three runways is 6,800 feet long and accommodates all of the jumbo jets. Because the airspace is tight over National due to the proximity of BWI and Dulles Airports, the controllers at all three locations are accustomed to working with each other to track planes and direct pilots. Prior to 9/11, an average of 1,100-1,200 planes including general aviation planes flew in and out of National each day. Since 9/11, the volume has dropped to 750 commercial flights daily and general aviation aircraft are banned from National.

National Airport operates in Class B Airspace, which is the second most restrictive. The bottom tier of the airspace is seven miles in width, and extends vertically upward for 1500 feet. Because it is three-tiered (like an inverted wedding cake), it used to be that airplanes could fly under class B airspace beyond a certain distance from the Capitol. Since 9/11, aircraft are no longer permitted to fly under National's restricted airspace. All aircraft are required to have an operable transponder and two-way radio communications to fly in Class B airspace. Because National's airspace centers over the Capitol, and conjoins two circles to the north and south (over BWI and Dulles), the airspace resembles "mickey mouse ears" in shape.

Simons commented that National deals with a incredibly high volume of helicopter traffic from the President, Vice President, military VIPs, news helicopters, and sightseers (less so, post-9/11), among other things. In response to this statement, Miles Kara asked Simons to comment on the airport's relationship with the Pentagon's helicopter pad. Simons said there is an air traffic control Tower at the Pentagon manned by military personnel (not FAA). The National controller coordinates take-offs and landings with the Pentagon controller. If a helicopter took off from the Pentagon pad before Flight 77 hit the Pentagon, then it would be noted in National's log from 9/11 since a National controller assigns routes.

National Tower has direct phone lines to the Tower at Andrews Air Force Base. Andrews is located within the "hub" of Washington National's airspace (described by Simon as an inverted wedding cake). Therefore, National works all of the arrivals and departures for Andrews. Typically, a controller at Andrews would notify by phone the flight data

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controller at National Tower thirty minutes in advance of takeoff. National would then confirm the aircraft, and a "flight progress strip" would then be issued for the plane at National. The same flight data controller would work all Andrews' traffic on a given shift. This person sat directly behind the seat in the TRACON designated for the Secret Service officer. National should have a record of all flights that took off and landed at Andrews on 9/11.

**Events of 9/11**

Simons introduced Commission staff to **Bob Lazar**, who was the most senior manager on duty at National the morning of 9/11. His title was "support manager." At the time the first plane hit the World Trade Center in New York, Lazar was in his office in the administrative wing of the airport, down the hall from the TRACON and the stairs that climb to the Tower. Upon hearing the news, he went to the break room located in between his office and the TRACON to watch the television. Due to his background in Navy Special Operations, terrorism immediately sprung to mind before it was reported by the newscasters. Lazar's response was to call special operations people at FAA Headquarters, but he received no answer. At about that time, the second Tower was hit. Immediately thereafter, a controller in the TRACON told him that Dulles had just notified them of a "fast-mover" heading towards Washington (Dulles' radar is seventeen miles west of National).

National forced a track on the unknown target. Lazar was not sure at what exact time National forced the track. **Victor Pagent** was the controller in the TRACON that first tracked the unknown. When primary radar locks in on a target, it tracks the target with a symbol. The TRACON would have been able to see it on radar, and the controllers in the Tower would also have been able to track it on their screens. Someone in the TRACON called Secret Service on the phone to inform them of the unknown target heading toward Washington. (National TRACON had direct telephone lines to Dulles and BWI TRACONs, as well as the U.S. Capitol and Secret Service.)

There was also a supervisor stationed in the TRACON, **Bert Simpson**, and a controller-in-charge in the Tower (**Carl something**).

When Lazar was in the TRACON, Flight 77 was ten miles outside of Washington and moving at 400 mph. Lazar started up to the Tower just as the plane hit the Pentagon.

When asked about the C-130 by Miles Kara, Lazar described it "as the one that chased Flight 77 around that day." Lazar confirmed that the C-130 had departed from Andrews before National had received word of the unknown target heading toward Washington. Once the target was known, the air traffic controllers at National asked the C-130 to turn and follow the plane as it headed toward what turned out to be the Pentagon. Lazar believed the C-130 was flying at 3,000 feet and reported that AA Flight 77 was flying below him.

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Controllers in the National Tower watched Flight 77 make a sweeping turn to hit the Pentagon. He reported that the turn was at treetop level, made for alignment purposes rather than an altitude change. [Note: NTSB has provided a simulation of the path of Flight 77. On viewing the simulation, Kevin Shaeffer made the same observation, namely, the path taken by AA 77 was for alignment purposes.]

Lazar told Miles Kara that he cannot remember whether they were running a north or south configuration that morning. It varies depending on the direction of the wind.

In response to Miles' question, Lazar told him he did not remember any aircraft with the call sign "Bobcat" that hung out over the national airspace that day. However, he did remember two fighters inbound from Langley that morning, and two more coming from the north but he did not think that they entered National's airspace. Simons stressed that he did not remember the bobcats specifically. Simons conjectured, from the excerpt of the log, that controllers from BWI were working the two "Bobcats" and needed vectors from National controllers. It appeared from the logs that the Bobcats departed in front of Flight 77, and Simons suggested that they could have been out of Air National Guard at Martin in Pennsylvania). He remembered that A-10s operated out of that location. [Note: flight strips and other information indicate that Bobcat 14 and Bobcat 17 originated out of Dover Air Force Base in Delaware. JSS radar data shows that they flew in trail at 21,000 feet and were overhead during the last few minutes of the flight of American Air 77. It is possible, but not confirmed, that they were Air Force corporate passenger jets.]

Lazar reported that word of the ground-stop ordered by Command Center was received at National from **Diane Creen** at BWI.

None of the FAA representatives at National were aware of any precautions taken by the airlines when they let passengers disembark the planes once FAA ordered all planes to land.

### **Changes Introduced Since 9/11**

(1) No General Aviation: Signature used to fly out of National. Waivers for prohibited aircrafts are issued by TSA on a case-by-case basis (such as for cabinet members, Members of Congress).

(2) Creation of an internal domestic ADIZ (Air Defense Identification Zone). [Note: ADIZ are primarily border protection zones. See various wall maps in the cubicle next to the water cooler for a trace of the CONUS ADIZ]

(3) Certain procedures are specific to arrivals and departures for National, such as the use of a code word for landings.

(4) TSA restriction that air passengers cannot stand within thirty minutes of arrival/departing National.

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(5) The DEN (Domestic Events Network) is monitored at all times.

(6) Controllers have taken on additional role of security officers (more vigilance on the job).

(7) ATC has new and enhanced relationships with organizations such as U.S. Customs, Secret Service, the military, and FAA Headquarters.

For several days after 9/11, National's TRACON operators controlled fighter jets on combat air patrol (CAP). Shortly after National re-opened for commercial aviation, Washington Center at Leesburg, VA assumed control of the CAP. Since 9/11, any suspicious activity heard over the DEN causes fighters to be sent over the area.

Lazar and Simons believe that changes to the system since 9/11 have been compartmentalized in response to perceived threats; and in so doing have not improved the intelligence communication flow between the different segments of the system. They acknowledged that there is a definite increase in available information on threats attributed to the increased number of operations and level of scrutiny in each case.

According to Simons and Lazar, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] They recommend that policy makers and military personnel work to have a better understanding of the ATC system before implementing ineffective (and in the case of codeword departures - detrimental) security measures. According to Lazar, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Simons recommended that every aircraft undergo screening on the ground, specifically cargo. Much can be done to improve pre-flight screening.

When asked if he knew who to call in the event of a hijacking - if he had sufficient training in advance of 9/11 - Lazar replied that yes, he knew who to call at the time, but all hijack training before 9/11 characterized the act as a tool used by terrorists to negotiate with the target country. Passengers and airlines were fairly confident they would eventually land safely. Post-9/11, Lazar is not sure if hijack training adequately prepares personnel for the new terrorist threat.

Since 9/11, air traffic controllers have been made to take on the additional security responsibilities in the system, whereas their main job function continues to be servicing the customer, separating the air traffic and ensuring all flights land safely. He believes it is not the role of ATC to provide security for the system; he believes it is the military's responsibility.

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Simons reported that U.S. Customs keeps a small number of Blackhawk helicopters at National. They have surveillance and identity responsibilities. U.S. Customs officials do not have shoot-down or interdiction authority. Simons and Lazar stated they believed DOD had that authority. Simons and Lazar did not know who specifically had the authority to make that decision should the question arise. Lazar suggested that some friction existed between U.S. Customs and DOD officials because of the different roles they perform with respect to investigations of suspicious aircraft. Lazar also noted that

[REDACTED]

Interestingly, NTSB and FBI did not conduct any interviews of the staff in the National Airport ATC. Bob Lazar thought staff from the Congressional Joint Inquiry may have interviewed personnel. [Note: Miles Kara, who worked on the Joint Inquiry, does not recall any such interviews.]

## II. Andrews Air Force Base

The Base has been active since 1958. Many Heads of State fly in and out of Andrews, as does the President's plane, Air Force One. It is eight nautical miles from National Airport. Two other small airports are located nearby: Hyde Washington Executive Airport (one mile from Andrews), and one in College Park, MD. **Steve Marra** and **James Ampey** are FAA ATC who have been stationed at Andrews Tower for many years. Both were on duty the morning of 9/11.

Before the move to Potomac, MD, the Andrews TRACON only had three screens. Eleven people moved from Andrews to Potomac when the TRACON was relocated. The TRACON controlled 2,000 feet of airspace. National controlled the rest. Currently, Andrews Tower employs 14 controllers, 3 supervisors, and 2 administrators.

The 113<sup>th</sup> Air National Guard Wing is housed across the airfield from the Tower. Since 9/11, it has built an alert facility. To equip a plane with weapons, the missiles are brought by truck from the weapons facility to the plane on the ramp. Steve Marra, who was a weapons mechanic before he became an ATC, said that it takes 4.5 - 8 minutes for a plane to take off once it is armed. Before 9/11, sidewinder missiles were not armed on launch.

On 9/11, Steve Marra was in the radar room when he heard on the radio that the World Trade Center was hit. He thought it may have been a Cessna. He left the radar room and turned on the TV, and then returned to the radar room in time to hear about the second hit. Following the attack on the Pentagon, he was rushed to a security briefing and the base began closing down.

Ampey stated he was on break when WTC 1 was hit. Ampey reported he witnessed the WTC 2 crash on television. Ampey further reported that after the two trade centers were hit, he went up to the Tower (this is while Marra was at the security briefing). He recalled looking through manuals to determine the SOP in the event of a hijacking, while the

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military personnel on hand were looking into SCATANA. He reported that it was a very confusing time, it wasn't something practiced, and no one knew who to call. There were an unusually high number of aircraft taking off and landing at Andrews that morning because previously scheduled military exercises were underway. The radar screens were showing "emergencies all over the place, so they started to take their own action (**Ampey didn't specify what he meant by that**). The controllers worked until 12:00 a.m. that night.

Chauncey had been attending a conference at Washington Center in Leesburg, VA that morning, and was in his car returning to the Base when he heard on the radio about the attacks.

**Karen Pontius from FAA Headquarters called Steve and** told him to launch F-16s to cap the airspace over Washington. He relayed that message by phone to the 113<sup>th</sup> fighter wing. He didn't recall who the officer was at the 113<sup>th</sup> that he spoke to that day. The fighters were armed and sent up. Langley fighters were already up, but they were unarmed and came down quickly because they ran out of fuel. [Note: This is an unclear recall by Steve. Langley fighters never came down—they were serviced by tankers out of McGuire AFB. Also, Langley fighters were NORAD alert fighters and should have been armed.]

Many planes were scrambled out of Andrews. Controllers received word that the President was expected to come in on Air Force One.

In looking through the flight strips from that day, Steve Marra found a ticket for a C-130, a Gopher 6 that took off from Andrews at 9:33 a.m.

Secret Service did not have a phone line to the Andrews Tower that day. Now there is a direct line from the Tower to the Secret Service, and Secret Service has a seat in the Tower.

The battle staff at the base handles physical security of the Tower. It passes out threat information daily.

The rumor that circulated that day, that "DC airspace is weapons free zone closed by Andrews" was dispelled by Andrews ATC staff. Andrews does not have the authority to close the airspace over Washington. It is possible for Washington National to close the airspace - they have the power to do so. According to Marra, the airspace was not closed that day by Andrews AFB personnel.

The three "Bullys" that appeared in the logs from 9/11 were identified by Marra as F-16s from the flight strips. They took off from Andrews at 8:36 a.m. and flew to 53-14 which is a restricted area over North Carolina. Two of them returned at 2:35 p.m. and the third one came in 12 minutes later. According to the flight strips, the first Andrews-based fighters scrambled and launched in response to the hijackings was at 11:12 a.m. AAFB had no contact with NORAD on 9-11.

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"Muscle" is the name of the 1<sup>st</sup> helicopter squadron at Andrews, many of which flew that day. Miles' "mystery flight" that hovered over Washington that morning could have been a state police helicopter, a stealth flight, or a helicopter from the 1<sup>st</sup> Muscle squad out of Andrews. Andrews' staff was unable to verify the identity of the aircraft. [Late analysis indicates the early morning flight referenced was a helicopter, most likely the morning traffic observation flight.]

National would have a record of what planes were over Washington that day.

The first time Andrews ATC heard from NORAD was the day after the attacks, on 9/12.

Since 9/11, the Andrews staff reported that there are fewer airplanes and tighter security. Scrambles out of Andrews are regimented and regular: (1) suit up; (2) battle stations (fighters get in the planes); and (3) running alert (which means they are ready for final word to take off.)

Marra reported that scrambles are faster and more efficient than anytime in the past. In the event that a plane enters the Washington Class B airspace, NEADS broadcasts the event over the DEN. The controller that picks up the target on radar will contact the owner of the airspace, who will in turn try and make contact with the pilot. More often than not, the pilot is not listening to the channel and cannot hear the controller telling him to leave the restricted airspace. Sometimes the pilot is talking on another channel. Meanwhile, fighters are scrambled, suit up, take battle stations, and wait on alert while the controller tries to make contact with the pilot. FAA usually manages to make contact with the pilot in a matter of minutes.

Situations like this arise on average twice daily. Indeed, while Commission staff members were present, the direct phone from NEADS rang and alerted the Tower to a scramble. Marra listened to the line and called out the status of the scramble to the other controllers (i.e., "battle stations") Shortly thereafter, the scramble was aborted.

Today, the Tower is in communication with, among others, National Airport, NORAD, the 113<sup>th</sup> National Air Guard, Secret Service, and NEADS. They are required to monitor the DEN at all times (although it was not on initially when Commission staff toured the Tower). The Secret Service has a seat in the Tower now, and is on constant alert - they are only present in the Tower when the President is landing, or as requested by a foreign head of state.

On the day Commission staff toured the Tower, the President of Israel, Ariel Sharon, came on base and departed on his presidential jet from Andrews. The Base was closed down and all persons and military and civilians were forced indoors, in advance of his arrival. As soon as the motorcade entered the base, aircraft were prohibited to travel within five miles of the runway. This event is called "sterilizing the runway."

Two Secret Service snipers manned the perimeter of the Tower, overlooking Sharon's plane. A Secret Service agent with headphones in the Tower reported on Sharon's

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progress toward Andrews and oversaw the departure from the Tower. Marra reported that the sequence of events and security measures were very similar to when Air Force One takes off. Typically, the president arrives by helicopter (Marine One) and lands within feet of Air Force One on the ramp under the Tower.